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The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic

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ciety Project at the University of Maryland has shown, the voices of many ordinary black soldiers can be found in federal sources. So *Freedom by the Sword* is a good book, but with further revision and editorial work it could have been even better.

The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic, by Barbara A. Gannon. Civil War America. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xiv, 282 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Sarah J. Purcell is associate professor of history at Grinnell College. She is working on a book tentatively titled *Spectacle of Grief: The Politics of Mourning and the U.S. Civil War*.

In her new book on the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) as an interracial institution, Barbara A. Gannon directly takes on previous scholarship on the GAR and, indeed, some of the broader scholarship on the memory of the Civil War. Gannon argues that other historians, especially Stuart McConnell in his 1992 book *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900*, have overemphasized the racism and segregation in the GAR. Far more important than racism in the GAR, she argues, was its interracial makeup and the integration of many posts.

Gannon asks as her central question, “What was the Grand Army of the Republic, and why did it welcome African Americans at a time when so many American institutions excluded them” (2)? In part one of the book she sketches how African Americans participated in the GAR and its female auxiliaries, taking part in all of the important GAR rituals, holding offices, and contributing to the ways GAR oratory and ceremonies shaped the public memory of Civil War veterans. In part two, Gannon turns her attention more fully to the interracial aspects of the GAR by explaining regional patterns of post-by-post segregation or integration. In part three she examines how white veterans recognized black veterans as sharing their sacrifice during the war and how they built a sense of “comradeship” based on a notion of common suffering. In part four she coins the term *the Won Cause* to describe the dual emphasis on union and freedom in GAR memories of the meaning of the war. After a short epilogue that traces the last days of the GAR in the twentieth century, Gannon includes two extremely helpful appendixes that list the African American and integrated GAR posts by state.

Gannon’s greatest success in this meticulously researched if unevenly argued book is to uncover the extent of African American participation and integration in the GAR. She shows how, remarkably,

some previous historians have missed the fact of the widespread integration of GAR posts because the GAR membership rolls themselves almost never included racial classifications. By combining extensive research in black newspapers and demographic records with deep investigation of membership rolls and other GAR records, Gannon is able to establish clearly just how many posts were truly interracial.

Both region and wartime experience influenced the integration of the GAR. Although many African American Union veterans lived in the South, only "a handful" belonged to integrated posts (87). Outside the South, Gannon convincingly argues, states—such as Kansas and Massachusetts—that organized all-black state regiments that had served in the East were more likely to see all-black GAR posts created after the war. Iowa stands out, in Gannon's account, as one of the most highly integrated states for GAR membership. Even though Gannon recognizes that Iowa and other midwestern states harbored anti-black racism before the war, she points out that white Iowans' extensive service in the western campaigns, where they often fought side by side with black units, helped to enhance the drive for integrated GAR posts after the war. In Iowa, only Keokuk had an all-black GAR post, and "about forty racially mixed posts existed in Iowa, from Davenport in the east to Red Oak in the west" (90). The relatively lower population of African American veterans in any one location in Iowa may also have contributed to GAR integration.

Gannon's research is impressive, and historians and genealogists alike will find her lists of integrated and segregated posts invaluable (although they might wish she had also included a list of all-white posts). Unfortunately, Gannon's bold historiographical argument and her attempt to understand the meaning of GAR integration in the era of Jim Crow are less successful. Gannon shows that white GAR members thought of black members as comrades and that they constructed an image of Civil War victory that included both saving the Union and ending slavery as goals of the war. She does not convincingly argue, though, *why* the GAR did not do more to fight racism and segregation or how whites could reconcile their personal racism with their acceptance of African Americans in the GAR. Her contention that American imperialism somehow intervened is not well proven or convincing.

The Won Cause brings an important new perspective on the GAR, but it does not dismantle the arguments of previous scholars as much as Gannon contends.